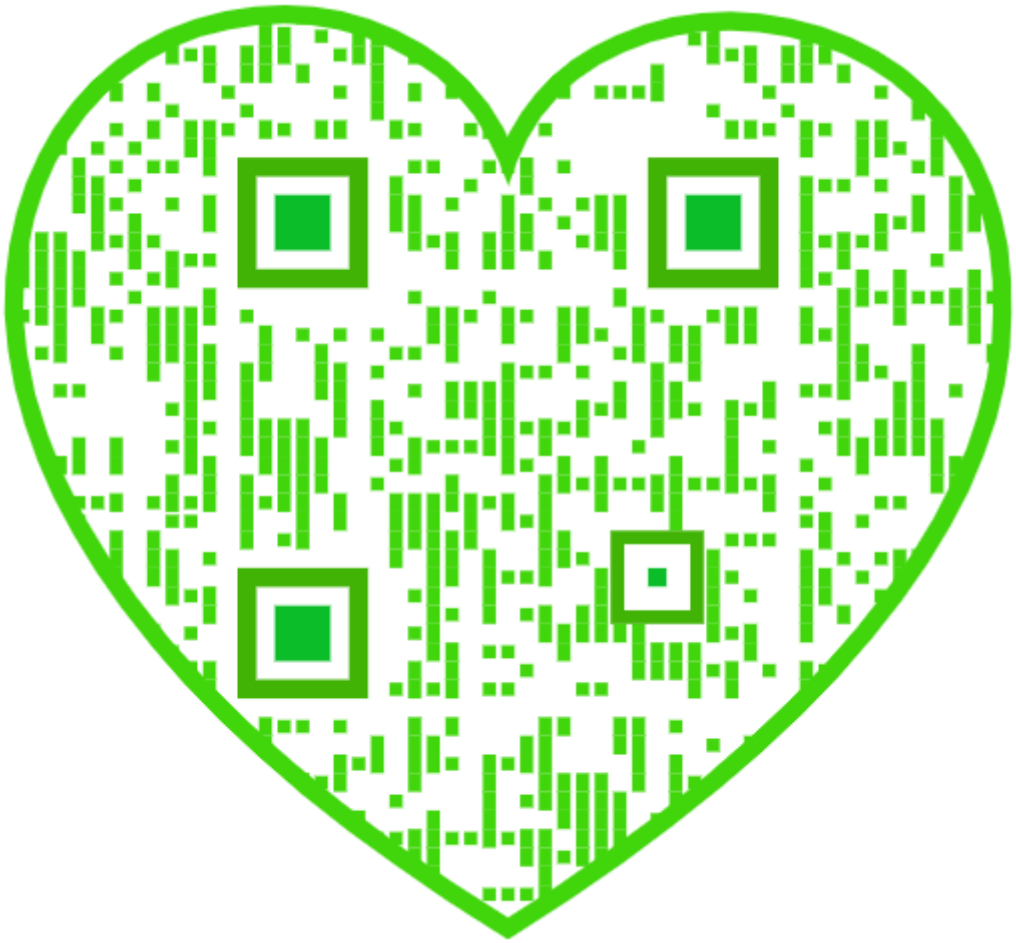
THE ART OF WORM-FISHING

ALEXANDER MACKIE



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THE ART OF WORM-FISHING

A PRACTICAL TREATISE ON CLEAR-WATER WORMING

BY

ALEXANDER MACKIE, M.A.

AUTHOR OF
"ABERDEENSHIRE," "NATURE KNOWLEDGE IN MODERN POETRY," ETC.

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PREFACE

THE writing of this little book has been suggested by the librarian of a public library. In his official capacity as a director of reading he is repeatedly consulted about books on worm-fishing. This puts him in a difficulty, because, as a matter of fact, no book exclusively devoted to the subject is in existence. Stewart's *Practical Angler*, an admirable book, devotes only a single chapter, of some thirty pages, to the topic. It therefore contains much that the readers in question consider irrelevant. They are on the outlook for something, not on trout-fishing in general, but on how to fish with worm —a less elaborate and exhaustive treatise, and at a smaller price. The following pages try to meet such cases. The author

has striven to be as brief as possible, and has resisted the temptation to discourse on all other aspects of fishing except the one in view.

Although putting in a strong plea for worm-fishing as practised in clear water, he should be sorry if he gave the impression that he holds by it as an exclusive form of sport. He is just as devoted to fly-fishing at the proper season; but it has been his fortune for thirty years to enjoy a prolonged holiday in July and August, when fly-fishing is largely in abeyance; and having been driven by this circumstance to long practice of clear-water worming, he feels entitled to claim some special knowledge of the art, and has some confidence in explaining the *modus operandi* which he has found successful, as well as in trying to account for the kind of pleasure associated with the sport. Moreover, because he holds that the fisher who has no thoughts for anything but a heavy basket is on a wrong tack, and is no genuine disciple of the immortal Izaak, he

has not refrained from introducing in the later chapters the collateral charms that come from a love of Nature. Such an added interest should be natural to the true angler, and he is unworthy of the name who does not ascribe part of his pleasure to that great and permanent source of innocent delight.

Acknowledgment is due to the proprietors of *The Aberdeen Free Press* for kind permission to reproduce "The Hill Burn" and "The Lowland Brook" (Chapters VII. and VIII.); as also to the proprietor of *The Scottish Field* for liberty to reprint "A Water-side Object-Lesson" and "Muddy Waters" (Chapters IX. and X.).

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"Let's talk of . . . worms."

Richard II.

THE ART OF WORM-FISHING

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

In certain aristocratic circles there exists a strong prejudice against all forms of worm-fishing. It is sneered at as a plebeian sport unworthy of the gentleman angler. Many a man who has no scruple in catching salmon with a prawn, or a minnow, or an eel-tail, turns with scorn from the trout-fisher who is filling his basket with the help of the humble earth-worm. Many proprietors, yielding to the prejudice, prohibit worm-fishing absolutely. When one tries to find an explanation of this unreasoning prejudice, the usual pleas put forward with more or

less sincerity are that worm-fishing is cruel, that it is a dirty practice, that it is too deadly, and that it requires no skill. None of these objections has any weight with the worm-fisher who plies his art in clear water.

The charge of cruelty is perhaps the most weighty. Does it mean cruelty to the trout, or cruelty to the worm? Supersensitive persons who cannot bear to extract a hook from a fish's mouth, and who delegate to more hardened spirits the necessary duty of killing a captured fish, should confine themselves to golf, and not harrow their souls by catching fish. All fishing, all shooting, fox-hunting and hare-coursing, involve a certain amount of cruelty, in so far as they imply the pursuit, capture, and death of lower animals. The escape of a wounded hare is a deplorable incident, out of all proportion to the escape of a trout or a salmon with a hook in its mouth. The fish will soon get rid of the tormenting steel, and suffer little in the process. It is proved by

numberless incidents that the cold-blooded fishes are not endowed with great sensitiveness of nerves, and a hook in their jaw is no bar to health, no check to a vigorous appetite. Moreover, the worm-fisher is in this respect on the same footing as the fisher who uses an artificial fly.

The objection, we presume, applies more particularly to the worm. It is cruel, we are told, to impale a worm on a hook, and its spasmodic writhings are an index to the creature's sufferings. True, the process of inserting the barb of a fairly large hook in a worm, and of embedding and concealing the shank in its internal organs, is, however skilfully done, a proceeding associated with some cruelty, and one that many persons shrink from. But this mode of treatment has now been largely superseded, and the Stewart tackle of three small hooks in Indian file removes the necessity of wanton cruelty. A tiny stitch at three places, just sufficient to keep the worm attached to the line, is all that is required. This, besides being more ex-

peditious from the angler's point of view, is more attractive to the trout, and reduces the cruelty, so far as the worm is concerned, to a minimum. Moreover, after all, a worm is very low in the scale of organisms. Its nervous system is primitive, and must not be gauged by that of humanity. The beetle that we tread upon does not feel pangs as great as when a giant dies, and a creature that can part with the half of its body and shortly add a new tail to its structure is not built after our model. It is sheer sentimentality to waste sympathy on such trifles when Nature herself is full of direst cruelty. The thrush that has snatched a dew-worm from the moist grass prods him with sharp beak until he is paralyzed and helpless, and either swallows him whole or tears him into convenient fragments. This is worse than the most callous of anglers. The mole bites off the heads of worms which he has captured, but cannot at present devour, in order that he may have them in reserve for his next meal. They lie wriggling in

his *cache* for, it may be, a whole day, unable to crawl into safety and freedom.

Then worm-fishing need not be dirty. Persons who take little interest in natural history regard all creeping and crawling things as uncleanly. But worms kept for a week or two in damp moss are perfectly clean, and to handle them is just as cleanly as to handle a trout. Besides, dirty fingers will wash, and as the angler is on a river-bank there is no lack of pure water for the purpose of ablution, and the daintiest of fingers may be washed at no expense as often as is necessary.

It is true that in the hands of a skilled fisherman the worm at the height of summer is a deadly bait, but that there is in consequence any risk of our northern rivers being depleted of trout all observant anglers will deny. At the best the season for this kind of sport is circumscribed, and the natural increase of the trout is more than equal to the strain upon the stock. One has only to see a rise of trout on the Deveron in the

early hours of a July morning to be convinced that no amount of legitimate fishing will ever deplete a river. A still pool on the Don will, on a warm summer evening, be boiling with rises, indicative of thousands of trout, and on a clear sunny day it is possible from a high bank to see the trout lying in shoals on a gravelly bottom. So numerous are they that even half a dozen taken every day of the week during the short season would make no appreciable reduction in their ranks. No; it is the poacher with his nefarious net, sweeping the pools in the dark, that destroys the stock. Our northern rivers have all plenty of suitable tributaries with gravel beds on which the trout spawn, and, being free from pollution, these side-streams are nurseries of trout, which soon fill up the gaps created by the angler in the main river.

Few people have any idea of the great number of trout that inhabit the rivers of the north. It may be different in southern streams, where gravel beds do

not exist in the tributaries for spawning purposes; but our northern streams are all amply provided with such adjuncts, and the result is a dense population everywhere, that makes artificial "stocking" a superfluity. An angler fishing for weeks on a side-stream, and basketing a few trout daily, is apt to come to the conclusion that the fish are not numerous. If he could dry up the bed of the stream he would know better. It has several times been the writer's fortune to be present when certain alterations were made in the course of small streams, whereby the water was suddenly diverted from a particular loop or elbow. Although only fifty or sixty yards of bed were thus laid bare, the hundreds of trout—great and small—that were found splashing and stranded in the shrunken shallows were a revelation. They were there by sackfuls and hundredweights. An object-lesson of this sort would at a stroke kill the prejudice that exists against worm-fishing. It would dissipate the ill-

grounded fear that the worm, or, for that matter, any other form of lure, however skilfully used, is a danger to the stock. In clear water the fish are averse to being seen; they hide themselves away among weeds, under overhanging banks, or in the hollows beneath boulders. It is only when the water is withdrawn that the secrets are disclosed.

Part of the prejudice which indubitably exists against worm-fishing arises from the fact that a great many of those who fish for trout to-day in our northern rivers are not native to the district, and are ignorant of the true state of affairs. They come from the south, and bring with them ideas of trout and of trout-fishing very natural in regions where the rivers have muddy beds and are without suitable tributaries for successful spawning. Certain chalk-streams in the south need to have their stock of fish supplemented annually by fry reared artificially. In no other way can a good supply of trout be maintained. But here, in the

north, the conditions are totally different, as those who have been bred on the river-bank know very well. Here the "no-worm" cry is a useless and wrong-headed restriction. Hundredweights of trout may be, and have been, taken from our local rivers every summer without making any appreciable impression on the stock of fish in the pools. If the proprietors who make these misplaced restrictions in the way of lures only knew it, their policy serves but to mark out their waters as very likely areas for the poacher to manipulate with his diabolical net. The illegitimate net clears the pools in a single night; to recover from the effects of such fishing takes years. Notwithstanding "spiked" stones dropped into the centre of leading pools, this kind of game, we have reason to believe, is still practised in remote and unfrequented districts.

We all know how difficult it is to keep down the prolific rabbit. In spite of guns, ferrets, snares, and traps, he multiplies exceedingly. It is the same with

our brown trout. The nefarious net is destructive; lime and dynamite are fatal to the stock; but no method of capture by rod and line, whether it be with worm, wet fly, dry fly, or minnow, makes any serious impression from year to year on their natural fecundity.

It is quite a mistake to suppose that worm-fishing in clear water calls for no skill or knowledge. That it needs both we hope to show in later chapters. If no skill were necessary it would be outside the category of genuine sporting pastimes.

It is not too much to say that every angler who begins to learn the art of fishing in boyhood begins with the worm. Apart from the easier method of using a net, this was probably the earliest form of fresh-water fishing. When the waters are "drumly" after rain, the boy sallies forth with rod and worm, and in the quiet backwaters catches some respectable trout. A success or two of such a kind are necessary if the youth is to persevere and become a skilled angler. He must first

draw blood. That achieved, he is bitten with the sport, and moves on to higher levels. The capture of trout in flooded waters is primitive, and though practised by youthful aspirants, by farm servants, and some anglers who fish merely for the pot, is at best a form of sport not high in the scale. It calls for only a small amount of skill and knowledge, but since it leads in general to something better it must not be despised. Without it, as an incentive, or as a whetter of the fishing appetite, there would be few anglers. In this little book we propose to put together as briefly as possible a few directions to the anglers who wish to learn the art of worm-fishing in clear water—a form of sport first advocated by Stewart in his *Practical Angler*, more than fifty years ago, and one likely to be associated for all time with his name, were it only for the kind of ingenious tackle which was his invention, and which, in spite of modern attempts to improve it, still holds the field.

CHAPTER II

ROD AND TACKLE

THE best rod for worm-fishing is one of considerable length. Short, light rods are all the modern fashion, but a two-handed sixteen-foot greenheart has proved itself the most satisfactory instrument for this kind of sport. As a matter of fact, it is really a small salmon-rod, and fairly stiff and heavy, but for thirty years it has been turned to clear-water worming with admirable results. When on occasion the writer has lent it to a friend and fallen back on another implement, shorter and more whippy, the basket has always suffered. A short rod is, of course, easier to manipulate among trees, and is less troublesome in negotiating palings and hedges, but if the fisher is to throw his

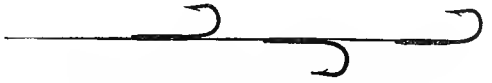
worm well and accurately, without any jerking, which will probably whisk it off the hook or mutilate it to uselessness, he must have a pretty long reach. Besides, if he is fishing a narrow burn, the banks of which are overgrown with lush and vigorous herbage, a long rod is the only safeguard against constant entanglements. A whippy, over-pliable point is bad; it gives too much when a fish is struck, and it is besides adverse to the skilful casting of the bait. With a stiff rod you may place your lure where you please, and the point being free from rebound after a cast, your line is straight and taut the moment the hook enters the water. No doubt such a rod as is here recommended is heavy, and, if used for fly-fishing, would soon wear out a fisher's strength, but in worm-fishing casting is much less frequent, and a man of average physique will seldom feel it tiresome, at least after a few days' practice. Moreover, he will find it a capital means of strengthening both the chest and the muscles of the arms—a result not to be

despised, for though the catching of fish is desirable, it should always be subsidiary to questions of health, and every method likely to promote soundness of physique should have the preference. In any case, a long rod with a short line will give less trouble and more success than a shorter rod and a longer line.

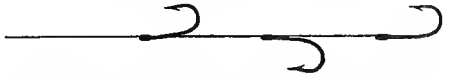
Any reel will do, provided its weight balances the rod, but the line must be fairly stout. A thin line is all very well for casting a fly, but with a worm at the end of your cast you have much greater command of the situation if the line be of substantial thickness. Only, as you cannot attach a single-gut cast to a thick line without an appearance of too great abruptness in the transition, it is advisable to fill the gap with a twisted cast which should be whipped, not knotted, to the end of the reel-line. At the end of all comes the single-gut cast, which for clear-water work must be fine—moderately fine, but not too delicate. The cast should not exceed six feet in length, and may well be shorter. If

nine feet, the usual length of a fly-cast, it will not fall inevitably at the place you wish the worm to reach.

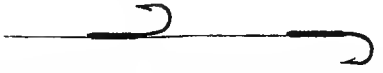
The hook that succeeds best is undoubtedly the Stewart tackle—three small hooks arranged alternately along the gut—two facing one way and one in the



THE ORDINARY STEWART TACKLE.



STEWART TACKLE WITH EYED HOOKS.



THE "PENNELL" TACKLE WITH TWO HOOKS.

opposite direction, or, for that matter, all in Indian file. One is often asked what is the best size of hook. Our own practice is all in favour of No. 10, for although it is true that No. 10 is a pretty conspicuous size, and may warn off certain trout that offer to take the worm, yet any

smaller size is apt, if you are using fairly plump worms, to get its barb embedded in the fleshy substance of the worm, and when you strike at a nibbling trout, the whole apparatus is drawn right out of the fish's mouth without so much as inflicting a scratch. A beginner should start with the larger sizes, and as he becomes more expert, he will gradually decline upon Nos. 11 and 12. With very small worms, No. 11 works well, but, on the whole, No. 10 is the safest size for general use. Of this size the angler should be provided with a good supply, for with lively sport, the tackle is soon chafed, and the waxed and varnished thread which binds the hook to the strand of gut soon yields to the friction of sharp teeth, and begins to unwind. As soon as the hold is uncertain, discard the tackle and tie on a fresh one. If you do not take this step at once, but delay, you are sure to rue your lack of decision, for, ten to one, the next trout that offers will be a big one, and at the crucial moment the

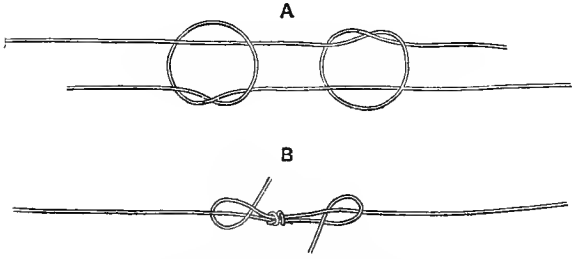
hold will give, and a good fish be lost to the basket. Sometimes, from sheer laziness, the angler is tempted to continue fishing with only two hooks, the point hook having gone either in a runaway trout or in the landing-net or otherwise, but this is foolish and will inevitably lose fish. Nothing but a fresh tackle will suffice. It is irksome, of course, when things are going well, to wade ashore for the purpose of getting out your hook-book and attaching a new tackle, but it is the surest way to avoid disappointments and disasters. These are bound to come in any case, but they should not be due to the negligence of the fisher.

It is not, of course, always necessary to wade to the bank. The prudent man will always have a few tackles ready for immediate use in a damping-box, where they are kept moist in damp blotting-paper, or in an old tobacco-pouch. One of these can easily be substituted for the useless tackle even in midstream.

Mr. Cholmondeley Pennell has modified Stewart's three hooks into a two-hook tackle, which some anglers prefer (see illustration, p. 15); but the writer has found Stewart's invention quite satisfying, and has never seen reason to adopt the modified tackle. The modern tendency is to use eyed hooks. These are in some respects an improvement. Having no fragile whipping, they last longer, and if the gut becomes chafed, they can easily and expeditiously be refitted. For ourselves, though we have sometimes used them, we always return to the original three uneyed hooks. One of these tackles, if carefully handled, will, in the absence of accidents, last a whole day, and this is good enough for all practical purposes.

Cast-lines are usually sold with loops at each end. One loop may be inserted in the end loop of the twisted cast, but the other should be cut away and knotted to the single thread of gut to which the hooks are attached. A loop so near the

worm is too conspicuous, and will alarm the more wary and desirable fish. The knot is the easy fisherman's knot. First form a single loop on the end of the cast; then insert the free end of the tackle gut in this loop, and turn an exactly similar loop round the cast. Draw the loops together, and tighten by pulling on the



THE FISHERMAN'S KNOT.
A, Loose; *B*, pulled tight with the loose ends tucked in.

free ends. These may then be tucked in by a turn round the gut, one at each side of the knot, and then cut close with a pair of scissors. In dry weather, however, gut should always be dipped in the water for a little before any knots are tied. It is so brittle that it will

crack if a knot be tied upon it when dry. If well moistened it will run no risk.

Those who are not fishing often should be careful to see that their tackle is put away dry. If shut up in a damp condition, it will emerge rotten and useless, and the first trout that is hooked will scamper off with the bulk of it at the first jerk. Day by day the cast-line should be tested before fishing begins, and any flaws detected should be removed. Moreover, the reel-line itself, if it has been much in use, loses its dressing, and the water gains entry to the interior. In that condition the line takes trouble to dry thoroughly, and if laid away for a few weeks will snap readily under a sharp jerk. It is tantalizing to see cast, twisted cast, and a few yards of line suddenly part company with the rod and float away downstream in tow of a vigorous trout. Invariably test your tackle at every point, especially at the beginning of the season, and discard at

once all material that is not absolutely reliable. Periodically overhaul your hook-book and dispose of the senile and super-annuated casts, which will only lead to despondency and regret.

CHAPTER III

OTHER NECESSARY EQUIPMENT

In this kind of fishing it is all but essential to wade if you are to enjoy the most favourable conditions and to achieve the best results. Therefore the angler's equipment is not complete without fishing stockings. These, with the collateral brogues and accompanying canvas protectors, are supplied in considerable variety and at varying prices by the rubber merchants and fishing-tackle makers. They should be a good fit, otherwise they will have a short life. If well cared for, and always dried inside and out after use, they will last for several years. If they wear, as usually happens, at one or two places where friction is at a maximum, they may be easily patched, provided they are not

worn quite through. If put away damp at the end of the season, they will rot, and be useless. Leaking waders are an abomination and an excellent recipe for rheumatism.

Without this aid the angler cannot be secure of escaping the observation of the keen-eyed trout. The river-bank, however low, is higher than the surface of the stream, and there the angler is set up conspicuously in view, so that the sharp eyes of the fish he wishes to catch detect him easily, and the trout sheer off at his approach. In the water, if it is only a few inches deep, he is low down, and wading upstream he is directly behind the trout, which, having no eyes in the back of their head, cannot see either him or his rod. Many a time an angler will hook a trout a few feet in front of him—a thing quite impossible in clear water from a parallel station on the bank, which would be within the circle of the trout's vision. It is not necessary to wade deep; a few yards from the bank is distance enough. More-

over, as this kind of fishing succeeds best in shallow water, the necessity for deep-wading, as in salmon-fishing, is avoided. But, on the other hand, as the river bottom is generally rough, the brogues should be well supplied with nails, which need to be frequently renewed, for they are soon worn to the leather by constant friction on hard stones.

Another part of the angler's necessary equipment is a landing-net. This adjunct need not be used on every occasion, but it is essential to have it at your back, to be used as circumstances demand. Be assured that if you forget it or discard it for a day you will once or twice miss it badly, and wish you had not been so foolish. Choose one with a good wide mouth and not too deep in the purse. A wide mouth makes it easier to bring a really big trout within its meshes. If the mouth be narrow, the fish may easily slip over the edge, and the flop that comes from failure may detach a slight hold and leave you lamenting your bad management. With

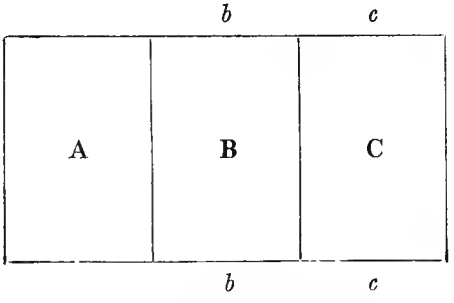
a deep purse, accidents of another kind happen. Very often only one of the three hooks is fast in the fish's mouth; the other two protrude, and, catching in the top of the net, become a fixture there. The weight of the fish dangling at full length in a deep net will break slender gut, and often two hooks are left in the net and one in the fish. This is a waste of good tackle, besides being a waste of precious time, for you cannot refit without making your way to the bank.

As to the mode of carrying the net, every man will devise his own method, and he will be very deficient in ingenuity who cannot plan some simple mode of operating which after a few days' practice will work smoothly. Some carry the net at their back, some at their side. It should never be hung so low as to catch on sharp stones or in weeds. However carried, it should be easy to lay hold of and as easy to restore to its place when the fish is out of it. Much depends on the nature of the handle. The tackle-makers in these

days of advance cater for all tastes, and provide great variety of equipment of this sort.

They will also supply the necessary creel. Any kind of fishing-basket will suit, provided it be big enough. A small creel is no doubt an index of modesty, but it is an unmixed nuisance. It may hold your lunch, your reel, and your hook-book when you set out, but after a successful day's sport with, say, twelve or fourteen pounds of trout to dispose of, it is altogether inadequate. A big, roomy basket will prompt the sarcasms of facetious wits whose idea of a day's sport is half a dozen troutlings reposing on a handful of grass, but these pleasantries are silenced when the basket is well filled. The basket should be large enough to hold all your paraphernalia and a good weight of fish besides. Only, as it is not fitting on a hot summer day to have fish rubbing shoulders with your lunch or your hook-book, you should have a waterproof bag for holding the fish. Half a yard of cheap

waterproof a yard or so in width will, with a little stitching, make a capital bag. Measure it into three equal parts, A B C; bring C over B and stitch together at the sides, *b*, *c*, leaving A free as a flap or lid to cover the mouth. This keeps the fish by themselves, and it can be easily washed



THE WATERPROOF BAG.

and dried before next day. Best of all is to have two such bags, one to relieve the other. If set in the sun to dry, it will soon lose all odour of fish. Some line their basket with a detachable lining of similar material, but this, though greatly preferable to the old mode of laying the fish in a bunch of fresh grass, is far behind

the convenience of the plan suggested. The bag accommodates itself readily to the other contents of your basket, just as well as the fish would if carried loose. In hot weather a basket that has held hundreds of fish acquires, in spite of fresh grass daily, a Caliban smell, but the waterproof bag kept rigorously clean does away with this drawback. Not only so, but the basket will last for many years, and not give way in the bottom, as usually happened in the old days through moisture accumulating in the interstices of the willow-work, and ultimately rotting it. It follows, from the use of a waterproof bag within the basket, that the hole in the basket-lid, that charming survival of primitive times, is rendered a superfluity. You are under the necessity of opening your basket-lid every time a fish is landed in order to deposit it beside its fellows in the bag. The flap helps to keep off flies in hot weather. We have seen fish carried for several hours in a basket have their gills full of the eggs of bluebottles.

Moreover, the bag preserves the look of the fish. Nothing looks worse than to see plump and beautifully spotted trout dried up and wrinkled by exposure to the drying atmosphere of a hot July day.

Other equipment each man will provide himself with as he sees fit, but he should have a pair of scissors, a good sharp knife, and some pins with good points.

CHAPTER IV

THE WORM

NEXT after the mechanical equipment come the worms. These, like everything else, are to-day provided at so much a hundred by the fishing-tackle makers. But most anglers prefer to find their own. In dry weather worms are not easy to come at, and recourse may then be had to the dealers. The angler should look ahead, and while there is still moisture in the earth lay in a goodly stock. The longer he keeps them in damp, but by no means wet, moss, the better they will become for his purpose. What is the best kind of worm? Our own experience, extending over thirty years, is that the so-called lob-worm is easily first. That is the blue-nosed species, which in

dry weather may be found in the earth, tied up in a sailor's knot. He is found in most garden soils, but during drought it takes a lot of digging to fill a canister. An ideal place for worms at all times is in the purlieus of the manor-house garden, in those back premises behind the greenhouses and the garden sheds where all the wastage and rubbish are judiciously laid out of sight in some shady retreat well concealed from the eye of the sun. Here amidst decaying vegetation, leaf-mould, and superannuated hotbeds an hour or two of steady labour will provide a good supply of succulent worms. These are mostly of the lively red-nosed species, which are by no means the best for the fisherman's purpose. To those who have no access to such a hunting-ground we would suggest something easier and better. The lob is less buoyant and wriggly. He revels in greatest quantity and in best condition in a fowls' run, which is beaten hard like a paved road. No matter how stony it is, dig into it and

see. Most people never think of such a spot as a likely hold, and give it the go-by, but a few tries with a stable graip will open their eyes. The lob seems partial to ground impregnated with fowls' droppings, and the rougher and stonier the ground the better, for the stones keep the moisture from evaporating, and every turn of the fork will produce six or seven excellent specimens in perfect trim for almost immediate use. If the ground is too rich the worms will be overgrown and too rotund in their proportions, but the abstinence from food that a month's sojourn in moss entails will reduce their corporations to normal size. They will then be toughened, and their digestive tract being freed from its contents, the worms will be of a tempting pinkish colour which the trout cannot resist. Some feed their imprisoned worms on cream, a perfectly useless luxury in our opinion. In hot weather the cream is certain to become sour, and ferment, thus destroying all the stock. Others doctor them with red

brick-dust to give them a redder tinge. But this is not necessary. Damp moss in a good-sized shallow soap-box is all that need be provided, only the box should be kept in a cool dark place, under cover, sheltered from rain, from wind, and from the rays of the sun. The lid must fit close, and if it should warp, as it probably will owing to the damp inside, a heavy stone will keep it sufficiently close to prevent the worms from escaping. Escape they certainly will if even a small aperture remain. Preserved in this easy way, worms will keep for six weeks, the usual period of clear-water worm-fishing. They become quite tough and leathery, and having lost some of their lusty vigour, will not be so likely to twist themselves into a round ball on the hooks—a state of matters fatal to sport and very troublesome, necessitating correction at once if it occur.

If too large to be used complete, the lob may be divided into two equal parts. Use the head-half first and keep the

remaining portion handy. The tail will be just as tempting and efficient a morsel as the head when the head has done its work. It sometimes has happened in our experience that a particularly beautiful worm has accounted for no fewer than four trout, two being taken in the first instance with the head and two others with the tail. It is wonderful how greedily even a ragged and much chewed lob, if of the enticing colour, will be attacked in the face of your misgiving that it is too disreputable and mutilated, and should be replaced by a fresher specimen. The moral is not to throw away one that has already killed, even if it be slightly shattered. On the other hand, a worm that prompts no attack after several inadequate trials proves itself unenticing, and should be removed without ceremony, especially if the colour strikes you as too dark. A worm dead and limp and sodden is useless.

Some anglers have a great belief in the brandling—a species of small red worm

brindled with concentric yellow rings all along its body. It is found in great numbers in the fermenting rubbish-heap at the back of a kitchen-garden, where carrot weedings and other succulent waste products are disposed of. In the high temperature generated by the fermenting process the brandlings revel, and here they may be gathered by the hundred in a few minutes. Our advice is, "Have nothing to do with them." The brandling does not keep well; he is too brittle at the best; and worst of all he is an evil-smelling creature, exuding at every stitch of the hook a yellow juice which messes your fingers in a most unpleasant and unwholesome way. Moreover, the trout, in our experience, show no partiality for brandlings, and in certain rivers do not seem to care for them. I know no river where they are greedily taken.

Another worm, the red-nosed, restless variety already referred to, is too soft for fishing purposes. The trout take it readily enough, but it is easily snatched off the

hook, and three out of four in this way capture nothing. The large dew-worm, which may be caught any warm summer evening after a shower, lying out of its form, with its tail securely fixed in its burrow and its head roaming about for decaying leaves, loose strands of grass, and other linings to its tunnel, is of no use for clear-water work. It is too large and too soft; a few of them make a good bait for a salmon in the back end, we are told, but, having never tried that form of enticement, we cannot vouch for it as a fact.

The lob is the thing for clear water. When you are ready to go to the river, select a hundred or so well-coloured specimens from your general repository, and place them either in a small flannel bag with damp moss or in a tin canister of convenient size, and you have material for a whole day's sport. With these, at the proper season, and with scientific methods, you are certain of a decent basket. You will find that the general

stock in your soap-box do not spread themselves over the close-packed moss, but congregate in a huge cluster all by themselves. This facilitates the replenishing of your daily supply. Any sickly or dead worm should be carefully withdrawn from the crowd.

A BAITED STEWART TACKLE WITH FOUR HOOKS.

CHAPTER V

WHEN TO FISH

If the common earth-worm were, like salmon roe, an illegal and forbidden bait, which some short-sighted individuals wish it to be, the ordinary trout-fisher would have no sport in the height of summer. After the fly season of April, May, and early June has passed, the fish, getting into prime condition, and waxing fat and lazy, seem to lose their appetite for fly-food. Moreover, in a dry summer the rivers in the northern part of our island fall low and clear, and even the smallest of artificial flies on the finest of tackle and cast with the best of skill, will not secure a basket. The dry fly, which is fast coming into vogue in the northern counties, given a suitable day, will

produce better results, but nothing can rival the good, old-fashioned, primitive worm as a sport-provider. During the second half of June, all through July, and for a part of early August, in ordinary seasons, the worm comes in opportunely, and gives sport of the best kind to those who know how to manipulate it. The average weight, too, of fish caught with the worm at this season is practically double the weight of fish caught with fly. The ordinary man, not versed in scientific fishing, holds the very elementary notion that the worm is good only during a spate. How often in a hot and cloudless July day is the angler, as he trudges in full fishing equipment to the river-bank, accosted by a chance wayfarer on the turnpike with some such remark as, "This is nae gude fishin' weather, I'm thinkin'. Ower little water for ye? ye'll be needin' a shooer"; and so on! When, hardly concealing your irritation at these wrong-headed speeches, you explain that you prefer the clear water, that you do not

want a spate, that you are having good sport and excellent baskets daily, your interlocutor gazes at you in open-mouthed astonishment. It is evident you leave on some of those hearers the impression that you are hardly of sound mind. They seem to think you either a consummate hypocrite or a born fool. In the country districts the practice of the local fishermen is stereotyped, and it is absolutely different from your method. As soon as a day's rain has brought the river down in a partial flood, out march every man and boy who can muster a home-made rod and a worm tackle. They repair to the river-bank and stick to the backwaters or the more sluggish pools, and drag out by main force, with no attempt at play, every trout that gorges their bait. The freshet over, they stow away their paraphernalia till the next spate again colours the water to their liking. So little has the art of clear-water worming succeeded in making any impression on the innate conservatism of the masses.

July is the ideal month, and the lower the water, the brighter the sky, the more steady the barometer, the better every way for sport, for health, and for enjoyment. In settled weather, no matter how bright and glaring the sun may be, or how high the temperature, a good basket is as certain as the sunrise itself. After the Lammas floods in early August the spell is broken and sport of this kind is over for a season. Recourse must then be had to other lures, fly or minnow.

A query often put to the angler is, "What is the best time of day to fish?" The man who is out for a holiday and in search of a healthful and absorbing recreation should not trouble himself with such problems, but go to the river after breakfast, and, taking a simple lunch with him for consumption on the river-bank, not return for his well-earned dinner till the sun is low in the west. He wants to catch fish, to be sure, but above all, he should desire to be much in the open air enjoying the bright sunshine and the fair face of smiling

Nature. If he has good sport thrown in, he will take all the more pleasure and health from his long day's exercise under unclouded skies. It will be hard if at some period of the day he does not find the trout complacent and ready to accept his kind invitation.

The "taking" time is, in our experience, by no means uniform. The only periods of the day that are absolutely certain to be favourable are the hour or so just before sunrise in the grey light of the dawn, and the same dim, dusky twilight that follows the set of sun. These two periods never fail to provide a basket, except, indeed, there has been a touch of frost in the early morning, when the "take" is retarded till after sunrise. In such half-lights the larger trout either do not see so distinctly as usual, or, being particularly hungry at these parts of the day, are somewhat off their guard. Even when it is so dark that the line in front of the angler can be made out with difficulty, the trout will pouch the worm in the most business-

like fashion. This would indicate that they are guided to it as much by the sense of smell as by the sense of sight. The same conclusion is forced upon us when we see trout taking a worm in very turbid water, where their vision must be circumscribed to a radius of an inch or two.

If the fisher has only a day or two at command, and is desirous of making the very most of his time, he should get up at 3 o'clock, and, fishing from 3.30 till 6, he will be a poor hand if he does not bring home 8 to 10 pounds of trout in time for an early breakfast. The evening hours are not, in our experience, so uniformly productive, but the surest way to the maximum of success is to fish upstream with the worm until it is so dark that you cannot make out the line, then add to the basket by changing your worm-cast to a fly-cast. During broad day the period of feeding is very uncertain and variable. We have seen them on several days very active from 7 till 9 in the morning;

then came a lull, and nothing was effected till 11 o'clock, when the fish were again active for an hour or so, afterwards falling off for good. An invariable test of the "take" being on or off is the catching of parr. If you catch parr after parr you may safely take it that the respectable trout are not on the feed. But be in no hurry, do not waste good worms on these greedy and persistent little thieves; take your time, and when you do catch a real trout, be up and doing, for in all probability the fish are coming on to feed, and you must lose not a moment. Make hay while the sun shines. It is your harvesting hour, and may not last long, so there should be no dallying. Suddenly, after a period of basketing trout after trout, and when you begin to think that if this rate of capture continues you are bound for a record basket, you find the obnoxious parr again in evidence, and you know that the trout, for some reason undivined by you, have gone off the feed.

These sudden and unaccountable moods,

that come on as if at a given trumpet signal and cease with equal abruptness, are very exasperating, but are real, as we have tested many a time. Other fishers on the same river experience the same vicissitudes exactly at the same moments as yourself. The novice is apt to think it is all owing to the part of the river he is fishing, and finding no success in the next reach, he trudges on in search of a better stretch of water, only to find that there also the fish are not. It is, of course, quite true that there are better and worse streams in every river, yet it is a mistake to suppose that, having had a good catch in section A yesterday, you may expect the same luck there to-day at a different hour of the day. Do not be surprised if it produce not a single trout; you are probably there too soon or too late, and have not hit the psychological moment. By the time you move on to section B, which produced little or nothing yesterday, the "take" may begin, and you will to-day draw your basket chiefly from it. The trout are

pretty evenly distributed all over the river, and it is to a large extent a fallacy to associate the place with the catch ; it is not so much place as time and circumstances that rule the basket. Viewing several miles of water after a whole month's experience, every yard of which had been fished several times, I could not point to any single short section, to any pool or shallow, that failed some day or other to yield a fair stock of fish ; and the same sort of uniformity of yield is true as regards the size of the trout, although, in one or two places characterized by big boulders and deeper pools—fit lurking-places for the monsters—the proportion of large trout was greater than elsewhere. A piece of water that you have long held to be of no repute, and are inclined to pass lightly over as unproductive, will some day astonish you and rise in your esteem if you happen upon it during a vigorous " take." The moral here is, despise not a single shallow.

When the trout are on the feed they

come out from their lurking-places under banks, under stones, and from the bottom of deep pools, and distribute themselves all over the river, lying in the shallows where the water is hardly deep enough to cover their back fins, stationing themselves at elbows and bends, at the edge of strong currents, keenly alert at every coign of vantage which commands a good view of the descending provender. There your descending worm will dance into their view, and, if it look unsuspicious, will be promptly swallowed. Every day you will have surprises and eye-openers that ultimately lead you to despise no single yard of the water. True, after prolonged drought, the shallower portions of the river bed, where the running water is without force of flow, are sure to be overgrown in the bottom with fresh-water *algæ*, green woolly growths that become entangled in your hooks and hide your worm from view. These growths must be carefully picked off—a time-wasting and tedious business which sometimes prompts you to

refrain from casting your worm into such parts, but it is not because you do not expect to find fish in them.

Wide shallow flats, which must be passed by in a still day, will produce good baskets if their surface is rippled by a moderate breeze. In bright sunshine the fish come out from deeper water to bask in these clean-bottomed, gravelly stretches, and the breeze breaks the mirror sufficiently to conceal both angler and instruments. Sometimes these reaches of an average depth of two or three inches will give better sport than any other part of the river.

CHAPTER VI

HOW TO FISH

We must now explain the *modus operandi* to which all this preliminary exposition is but the prelude. The great point in clear-water fishing is to keep well out of sight. The novice must first serve an apprenticeship in the art of self-concealment. He must have "the receipt of fern-seed and walk invisible." This is his first important lesson, and, till he has learned it well, his success will be small. One contributory aid towards this end is, as we have already explained, to use waders. If need be, the fisher wades right up the centre of the stream, casting forwards to left and to right; but in general the distance of a few yards from the edge on either side is enough to secure practical invisibility. The veriest

greenhorn knows that the trout lie with their heads upstream; they always face the running water, partly because they are watching for what it may bring, chiefly because in no other way can their gills perform the breathing process. If you cast your worm upstream, and allow it to float down with the current, the trout see it as it passes them, without being aware of your fateful presence behind all. But the shadow of your rod, or too much line, or gut that glances in the sunlight, creates suspicion, and may be fatal to your success.

Do not walk down the river-side on a high bank to look for a likely place to begin. This is the ideal way to expose yourself and scare all the best trout to take hiding under banks, stones, and waving weeds. Approach your starting-point either at right angles or from below. The best place for sport is not a still, deep pool, but a brawling stream with plenty of boulders in it, partly in the water, partly protruding. A series of shallow rapids,

broken into innumerable little runnels and courses, will, even if it be of no greater extent than a few hundred yards, afford you ample scope for your activity during a livelong day. If this broken water ends, as often happens, in a deep, quiet pool, your cue is to begin at the very top of this pool and gradually work your way up, casting your worm ahead and covering every inch of the ground. First you set up your rod on the bank, well below the place you have chosen for commencing the attack. Then you fit on your cast-line, making sure that it is sound and reliable; select an attractive worm, which you fix *neatly* and natural-like, head downmost (the head is the heaviest part, and will sink), just as it would float downstream if it had slipped from dry land into the running water. Then, drawing from your reel as much line as is equal to the length of your rod, cast gently upwards into the nearest likely corner, behind a stone, past an overhanging bank, at the edge of an islet of weeds or into a rushing current.

Use no sinker. It would only retard your worm and destroy the naturalness of its movement; besides that, it would probably cause your hook to sink too low and catch in some piece of embedded stick or some bottom weed. The only occasion for a sinker, and that a very tiny one, is when you are facing a strong head-wind. This will catch your line and bring the worm down faster than the water. The sinker both retards the line and helps you to cast. As soon as the worm touches the water, at the full stretch of your free line, it will begin to travel towards you with the descending current, and you must slowly raise your rod-point in unison with its rate of progress to ensure that your line is perfectly taut. Suddenly the line stops in its descent; you feel a slight tremor like a miniature electric shock, and by-and-by a tug-tug of an unmistakable kind. A trout is actually negotiating your worm, and before he swallows it or runs off with it to devour it elsewhere, you must deftly, but with a certain firmness, strike the

hook home by a slight movement of the rod-point. If you have struck with the requisite amount of force, and have chosen the right moment, he is hooked. A few mistakes arising from striking too soon, or too late, or too hard, or not hard enough, will soon be corrected by practice. Herein lies great part of the expert's skill, which he has acquired by long practice regulated by keen and intelligent observation. All this calls for close attention, and alert absorption, and wideawake judgment, and if it did not call these gifts into play, the sport would not deserve the name of a gentle art. The best fisher is the man who brings to bear these admirable qualities in greatest force. A dreamy, inattentive, absent-minded man will never be a successful angler. The pastime demands a delicate touch, a nice discernment, and a quick decision.

A fish hooked is good: it is something gained, and promises well; but a fish in the landing-net is better. One sees a novice, sometimes youthful, but sometimes of

years mature enough to suggest better things, throw a fish, or attempt to throw a fish, by main force on the bank. This must be a survival from the days of uncivilized barbarism, when man was a hunter and fished not for love of sport, but from the necessity of finding a meal, and when the evolution of sport as an art of enjoyment had not begun. Needless to say, such a proceeding is foolish, unsportsmanlike, inartistic. However, it cures itself, for the tackle is certain to resent such a sudden strain upon its fibres, and a few broken casts will sober the excitable man and teach him a more coaxing way. The fish, if a good and weighty one, must be allowed to wear himself out; this will soon be achieved in strong-running water, to which the quarry is sure to betake himself at the first sense of restraint. When so far exhausted with his spurt for freedom, he must be gently brought to the net. You wind up your reel till the length of line from the point is equal to the length of your rod; then unsling your

landing-net and gradually, by raising the rod, bring him within reach of its meshes.

Once he is safely there, the battle is won. But, with rod, net and trout all to be manipulated, your hands are full, and the situation calls for some management. This is the moment at which you are tempted to wish you had three hands instead of two. The best way to manage is, thrust the butt end of your rod into the top of your left wading-stocking and lean the rod itself over your shoulder. The net is in your right hand; with the left take out the trout, and while the handle of the net is kept secure under your right arm, break the trout's neck by pressing back his upper jaw with your right thumb; then restore the net to its usual hanging-place and basket your trout. Care must be taken, however, in picking the fish from the net, for he is wriggling in its meshes, and if the hooks protrude they may catch in your hand, and a sudden jerk will send such tiny things over the barb in the softer parts of your fingers.

If this happens once, you may be sure it will seldom happen again. The lesson is a hard one and sufficiently impressive, for a barb is not so easy to extract from the tougher muscle of the human species as it is from the soft mouth of a trout. Assuming that such an accident happens, you must cut away all but the hook, clear the shank of the varnished thread, and bring out the barbed point at a fresh opening. The whole hook may then quite easily be drawn through the new channel thus created. It is a somewhat painful process, and if the hook is in your right hand not easy of accomplishment without extraneous help. This it is best to look out for at once, otherwise your day's sport will be brought to a sudden termination.

The fish, dead and free of the hook, should be dipped in the running stream to remove any blood-stains he may have upon him, and is then placed in the waterproof bag, not doubled up, or thrust in anyhow, but laid out at full length to preserve his

appearance. He will soon stiffen, and if laid away in a cramped position will look ill when your catch comes to be disposed of. The flap is closed down to keep off flies. A fresh worm, if need be, is put on the hook, and the same process is repeated. Never move on till you have well tried every foot of the water, both on your own side, in midstream, and on the opposite strand. When all these areas have been well tried and fail to produce bites, it is time to move on a step or two. When a bigger trout than usual—say a two-pounder or even one of a pound and a half—takes the hook, it is safer to move downstream a little and to step on to the bank. This gives you more freedom of movement, and avoids risking the loss of a really good fish, but all splashing and plunging and excitable movements should be avoided.

The best object-lesson a beginner can have is to watch from a bridge or from a high bank the behaviour of trout in a quiet pool or in a stream which is free from a broken surface. A field-glass brought

to bear on the depths of the pool will in bright sunshine bring the whole scene vividly before him. Half a dozen grey shadows swaying gently parallel with the current will easily be made out. These are the trout, coloured by Nature for concealment in harmony with their surroundings—the largest fish in the best place in the centre—a few inferior specimens on the wings right and left. They are on the feed, watching whatever the running water brings within their reach. The big trout has the first choice; he is a regular autocrat, and none of the smaller fry dare challenge his supremacy. He moves to right or to left or glides nimbly to the surface, swallowing each dainty morsel that comes within his range, then sinks back gracefully to his favourite station. A bold and presumptuous youngster may now and again try to dispute his sovereignty, but he is soon sent to the right-about, and beats an ignominious retreat. Show yourself conspicuously on the bank or throw a small pebble into the midst of the inter-

esting group, and there is not left the twinkle of a fin. They retreat to their secret holds, and only after a considerable lapse of time will they resume their several stations. Next day you will find them drawn up exactly as they were the day before. If the leader is caught, his place is immediately filled by the next best in the pool, so that a good position is never without a worthy tenant.

All small fry should be returned to the river. Where good-sized trout are to be had in fair numbers there is no temptation to retain the small ones. A fisher who readily catches every day trout of a pound weight acquires a kind of contempt for the tyro who baskets everything he lands. We forgive a young angler for carrying home all the little fingerlings; he is learning his business, and will take all the more pleasure in the process if he has something to show as evidence of his growing skill; but the experienced hand should disdain such slaughter and reject everything under a

quarter of a pound. This practice helps to preserve the nursery stock.

It almost invariably happens, when you are extracting your hook from the mouth of a large trout, that he disgorges a half-digested parr, sometimes of considerable size. This is testimony to the destructiveness of these cannibals, and reconciles you to their death. Their decease is a good riddance, for, once started on a predatory course, and once accustomed to a trout diet, they are not likely to depart from it, and the daily toll they levy on the rising generation, especially on salmon parr, is a grievous loss to the young stock. We have surprised a biggish trout at the water-edge in the act of slaying a younger brother. He seized his victim by the belly, and sailed across the pool with the captured trout in his mouth like a cat with a mouse, or a dog with a bone, and no doubt swallowed his prey at his leisure in some quiet corner where there was none to interrupt his breakfast.

What should be done with the fish

when you empty your basket? As a rule, the fisher cares little for their fate after they reach the family larder. In any case, the fish should never be sold, but given away, preferably to people in the district who in a manner have a proprietary right to the products of their river. Your liberality reconciles them to your occasional trespass on their fields, and to any damage you may accidentally do to their fences; it tends also to make them overlook the disturbance which a stranger makes amongst grazing cattle, for your transit through their field may cause them to be restless, and to give up feeding for a time. Gifts of trout are well directed in these circumstances.

Fishers should be scrupulously careful, in disposing of useless hooks, to throw them into the river, and not drop them on the grass, where they may be swallowed by grazing cattle, and cause both pain and loss. In the river they will sink amongst the gravel, and rust will soon eat away their dangerous parts.

CHAPTER VII

A HILL BURN

HERE is the hill burn, as bright, as lively, as volatile and wayward as ever—now sparkling in the July sunshine; now brawling over its grey, old-world boulders, and rounding their hard granite edges; now spreading itself out over golden gravel in a shallow pool where the trout bask; now burrowing under an overhanging bank, and kissing the willow twigs that lave their silvery leaves in its cool refreshing waters; now rippling with purling murmur or childlike prattle through a chain of boisterous rapids, here hurrying, there loitering, but always moving steadily on, fulfilling its destiny as a feeder of the great river of the broad

cultivated valley. Who that has come under its magnetism can resist its charms? Be he mere pedestrian, hunting, walking-stick in hand, for the picturesque, or amateur photographer armed with twentieth-century Kodak, or sportsman following his dogs, and on the outlook for a crowded covey, or fisherman with rod and creel, he will find a day spent in its genial company a day of pleasant surprises and of sweet experiences worthy of being stored in the most retentive part of his memory—pictures that will force themselves into consciousness when, prisoned in lonely rooms in the busy city, he turns from the wintry drizzle of grimy streets, and the sickening worries of business, to refresh his soul with draughts at purer fountains. Yes, we would say, start a friendship with a hill burn, study its varying moods and its erratic meanderings, wander lovingly on its thymy banks, watch closely the life that hangs upon its skirts and haunts its pebbly bed, and you will have a fellowship

which no adversity, no evil tongue, can dissolve:

> "Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,
> Nor man nor boy,
> Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
> Can utterly abolish or destroy."

Traverse its route on a July day, up from its broader mouth, where it cuts its channel at an acute angle through high banks and loses its individuality in the less pellucid bosom of the river, and accompany it in its wanderings till you trace its first beginnings, five or six simple threads, tiny runnels that come bounding over the hill-sides from east and north and west, and creep through an area of mossy morass, before joining waters in the lower reaches; follow it for a whole summer day, and you will find much to stir your fancy and fill your soul with pleasurable emotions.

Are you interested in animal life? Here you will find it in plenty, and lying on a downy couch you may watch the creatures in their native haunts with a

binocular and learn something of their ways. Already the green-crested lapwing is gyrating round your head in wide circles, and the "sough" of his broad wings and the wail of his unvarying cries make music in your ears. From the lone moorland afar off comes the clear pipe of the curlew's call. The red-grouse, resenting your intrusion into his domain, hurls at you his emphatic "Go back! go back, go back!" but you fail to obey. The oyster-catcher is there, shrilling his piercing whistle of alarm, as he flies back and forth overhead, his red beak conspicuous in the sun; the grey heron, with lazy wing and slow and solemn flight, mounts into the blue as you turn a projecting headland and surprise him at his meal. The white-tailed rabbits at your approach scuttle off to the security of their burrows, and the mountain-hare, curious, as 'twould seem, to know what manner of man you are, squats on her hind legs and studiously scans your movements from a coign of vantage on the brown hill-side. The

black-faced sheep rush pell-mell through the heather, in unconcealed alarm at your unfamiliar figure. A yellow-hammer flashes like a golden arrow from that broom bush, and sure enough here is the nest with its three warm, striated eggs resting on their horse-hair cushion. Yonder are two hooded crows making a savoury meal by picking the bones of a dead sheep, and there is a note of anger in their hoarse cry as you interrupt the feast. It is apparent that you are an unwelcome visitor; and yet the water-ousel, that dainty little gentleman with the white waistcoat, has curtsied to you many a polite good-morning from a moss-crowned stone in the middle of the current. He at least is glad to see you; he either guesses you are harmless, or knows that you cannot harm him. So, strong in your own sense of rectitude and innocence, you pursue your course and see and hear all that this new little world has to disclose. But an adder, two feet long, glides with swift motion through the

green open into the concealment of the heather, and you make no attempt at pursuit.

Are you a student of botany? Here, then, is the very place for you. Now we are on boggy, mossy ground where the carpet of sphagnum in all shades of green and gold and red offers but a precarious foothold, where St. John's wort, the louse-wort, the butterwort, the ragged robin, and the sundew meet your eye at every turn, and where (who knows?) you may light upon some rarity you have not gathered for many a day. The cordate leaves of the grass of Parnassus are seen emerging from the moss, but their white chalices will not be displayed till six weeks have passed. The tall fox-gloves are flaunting high their purple bells to draw the notice of the wandering bumble-bees; violas—*lutea*, *tricolor*, *canina*—are everywhere; the Alpine lady's mantle spreads out its rosette of gracefully out-lined, silver-edged leaves at your feet; the yellow mimulus, the water ranunculus,

brooklime and watercress, saxifrage and silver-weed are all in rank abundance at the burnside. Orchises and rock-roses, carexes and ferns in great variety—the oak, with its fragile tender fronds and the male shield fern, with feathery plumes, are dotted at the fringe of the firwood that here encroaches on the wealth of heather. And now you come to a primitive bridge engineered by the local shepherd for his own convenience, a structure not likely to resist successfully a winter flood—two sturdy Scots fir branches laid parallel and topped with heather turf for greater security of foothold.

These and much else the eager saunterer will find if he walk in reverent and humble mood and keep his eyes active. Butterflies and beetles, grasshoppers and ephemeræ, may be added to his collection. The sources of interest are endless and inexhaustible. The very pebbles on the gravelly shingles are objects worthy of study, and carry their story on their faces to those who have skill to read it. The

contour of the hills, the stratification of the scaur's red side, the boulder clays of glacial times, the intrusive vein of serpentine and limestone amongst the prevailing granite, all give food for profitable thought and speculative wonder.

Such matters are by no means thrown away upon the angler; he, too, ought to have keen eyes for them all, but the greater part of his attention is focussed, of course, on his special pursuit. If he is expert with the worm, and knows his business, he will soon fill his basket with the silvery trout that lurk in the many hiding-places of the moving waters, and fatten on the insect-life that swarms along its banks. But he must first be past-master in the art of self-concealment. This is the first and most important lesson the novice has to learn. Till he learns that trick, and treats it as of paramount importance, his success will be small. Let him boldly walk down the bank, taking a cast here and a cast there, and making himself a conspicuous object to every trout's eye in

the burn, and the weight of his basket will not be such as to induce a backache that day. No! that way failure lies. But if he is willing to be guided by the experienced, and will fish upstream, studiously keeping himself in the background and as far as possible stalking the fish, there is hardly any limit to his captures. To many it will seem absurd that we should recommend waders for such a paltry water, and yet these, in our experience, are the shortest and most direct method of attaining practical invisibility. Of course, there is no wading proper in a stream where the broadest pool is only 12 or 15 feet across, and the deepest water is 30 inches, but to stand in the bed of the stream is the surest way of escaping the eyes of the fish. You can cross and recross with ease and stalk every pool to advantage, picking out more and better trout than is possible in any other way known to us. No doubt a hardy man who has no fear of rheumatism will walk through the shallows and disdain the inconvenience of wet feet, and one

who is always in the open air and leads an out-door life may practise such a course with impunity; but your town-bred angler, whose upbringing has not been on a Spartan standard, had better avoid these enthusiastic indiscretions if he wishes to keep clear of a rheumatic old age. It is no doubt possible to approach a pool on your stomach, and by dint of much crawling, crouching, and bending attain the same end; but these devices are trying and wearying, and with a basket on your back and, perhaps, a landing-net at your thigh, are apt to get you into difficulties and take more expenditure of bodily force than the simpler plan which we advocate. It is true that even short waders are somewhat oppressive in a hot summer day when there is a good deal of rough walking to be encountered; but let the angler take his time and not hurry, let him try every likely corner, and thoroughly exhaust the possibilities of each pool and shallow, each sheltering stone and hollow bank, before he moves on, and he will not

suffer from undue perspiration. He will at the end of the day be fresher and have a much heavier creel than the man who, though unencumbered with waders, has raced over miles of water.

The same long rod, the same short line, are in place here as in the larger river, and the same tactics will tell. When you move, let there be no splashing or plunging. Above all, be cool and alert, for though the majority of your fish are bound to be relatively small, there will come every now and again a big fellow, and these are the moments that demand your best skill and the moments that if bungled make an appreciable difference to the basket. The careless man who is taken at unawares and loses all the best fish likes to blame his tackle and everything but his own unreadiness. If with very fine tackle he strikes a heavy fish too hard, it is not surprising that the cast-line snaps. Even the most guarded hand will make an occasional error, but the discreet hand of dainty touch is seldom at fault.

We would only add this counsel, "If you would view the hill burn aright, be you botanist or angler, you must view it alone." Two are not company in such a scene. The full influence of its magic, the complete significance of its many charms, will be felt only when you are undisturbed by others' comments, when your soul is unconfined and free to be played upon by all the telepathic waves which emanate from Mother Nature in her most serene and soothing mood.

THE HILL BURN.

(*After Tennyson's "Brook."*)

I come from where the curlew calls
Among the lonely heather,
I gather force from waterfalls
When it is rainy weather.

I kiss the bases of the hills,
Beneath my banks I burrow,
And then I sweep past water-mills
As straight as any furrow.

I love to see the black-faced sheep,
To hear the shepherd's whistle;
I make the spotted troutlings leap,
I feed the prickly thistle.

The red-grouse come to me for drink,
I know their gurgling cackle ;
The angler, too, stands on the brink,
I sometimes break his tackle.

The water-ousel takes his bath,
And splashes where I'm shallow ;
The linnet flits about my path,
Or trills from every sallow.

I dance along my granite bed,
With many a snag I tussle ;
The red-deer bends his antlered head,
And in me dips his muzzle.

At eve and morn the rabbits gray
Come nibbling at my grasses ;
The weasel stalks them every day,
They scatter as he passes.

I scent the wild-thyme and the broom,
When south winds bring the midges ;
In wicked winter mood I doom
The fragile wooden bridges.

The sun lights up my crystal pools
And warms me with his arrows ;
When winter comes, my bosom cools,
And freezes to the marrows.

Few are the trees upon my bank,
Save here a birch or willow,
But rushes thrive where it is dank,
And mosses raise a pillow.

I hear the sportsman's echoing shot,
I see the coveys reeling;
And here and there I spy a cot,
And here and there a shieling.

So gathering silver threads along,
I weave them as they quiver,
And then, at last, I plunge headlong,
And lose me in the river.

I gurgle, gabble, prattle, pour,
To join the gleaming river;
I leap, I kiss, I splash, I roar
For ever and for ever.

CHAPTER VIII

A LOWLAND BROOK

THE hill burn and the lowland brook are different. Their difference is the contrast between the gay, lively Celt and the dull, plodding Teuton. The stream of the hills is bright, sparkling, joyous, wanton; it abounds in dancing cascades, and rejoices in brawling music. It leaps from ledge to ledge with a swift and graceful motion, spurning its heathery banks and its shining gravelly beaches, as if in fear of being curbed or controlled. It knows not fences, standing open to the heather right and left, and the black-faced sheep nibble the more succulent herbage of its mantling banks to the very quick. The wild-thyme creeps to the edge of the current and scents the air as it is crushed under the foot of the passer-by.

Down in the lowlands, in a comparatively flat and purely agricultural region, the brook is dour and sluggish. It meanders through green corn-fields and cattle-dotted pasture lands, and is at all points scrupulously fenced as if it were an intruder, an unwelcome visitant to be kept in its place. Its banks are lush with overfed greenery, reeds and grasses of abnormal growth, butter-burrs and irises, meadow-sweet and marsh-thistles, rushes and fescues, centaury and valerian, cow-parsnip and wild rose. Only here and there, at pronounced intervals, does it break into a run; it glides sedately and serenely through the trailing and retarding vegetation which is really the product of its own too bountiful nurture. It does not chatter as it flows; it is all but voiceless; it moves demurely, without gaiety and without sprightliness. It is, indeed, only the drain-pipe of the turnip-fields and the conduit of the surface water that runs off the highways. Now and again the fences cross its bed to provide a

natural drinking-trough for the cattle grazing in the contiguous fields, but otherwise, throughout its whole five or six miles, it is encased in two parallel outworks of barbed wire, and woe betide the luckless pedestrian who ventures, without the most punctilious care, to negotiate those irritating barriers to his progress. No grouse visit it, but the partridge is here, churr-churring amongst the hay, and the water-hen and the wild-duck are many times flushed as you make your noisy way through the thick-set stems. The water-voles, quick to take alarm at your rustling progress among the long grasses, flop unseen from the bank into the water, and, head in air, quickly swim across to the safety of their tunnels. The yellow mimulus flaunts its bright flowers in great profusion along the margin of the banks, and at every breath of wind or other disturbing motion shakes its petals into the stream, until there is quite a procession of these gay fairy argosies sailing down the current in the

company of the white foam-flakes. A stirring on the opposite bank draws your eyes to a stoat whose black tail proclaims his kinship. He is out on the hunt, and seems to be nervously sniffing the atmosphere as if conscious of human intruders on his demesne. The meadow-pipits, the yellow-hammers, and willow-warblers jerk out an occasional sweet piping trill from the few rose-bushes and willows that have secured a footing on the bank. Gorse seed-pods crackle and explode unceasingly in the warm sunshine, and the wild-raspberry fruit gleams red against its background of green. A rich agricultural country, as far as the eye can reach, stretches before you, every acre being under the plough, except a few islets of woodland and the narrow strips along the brink of the stream, and even these have been pared away to their narrowest limits.

Such a burn as is here sketched is certain to be well stocked with trout. You know this before you look into its

waters. Well-tilled land and well-conditioned trout go together, assuming that all pollution is eliminated. To the fisher who is used to the sweep and breadth of a large river, the brook offers a tempting variety, a change of methods. Here then is a source of real pleasure to those whose natural leanings bend in this direction. On a bright sun-flooded day, without wind, you are sure to have the water entirely to yourself, for there still lingers the mistaken notion that such a day will produce nothing in the way of sport, that the water is too low and too clear to make any success possible. Never was a greater blunder! If the fish are there, it is yours to deceive them by skilful and adroit deceptions. Of course, you must not be seen. It is sometimes necessary when the bank is threadbare, to approach the water after the manner of a snake, in a horizontal, not a vertical attitude—an undignified mode of approach to which some anglers have serious objections; but here, unless you are of giant proportions,

you are sufficiently concealed in the miniature forest of luxurious vegetation, and the fish ahead of you will not see you if you fish upstream. Moreover, they are mostly under the shelving bank, and this should be your objective. The difficulty is the sun, and the shadows he projects upon the water—shadows of yourself and of your long rod—but even this difficulty can be overcome by a little forethought. Keep the sun on the opposite bank always, and as he moves round, change to the other side at the first opportunity. A windy day is troublesome, for the gusty flaws blow your line hither and thither, and there is always some thistle-head, some queen of the meadow inflorescence, some spiky grass to catch your wind-tossed hooks. These are easily released at the loss of a little time and at the possible risk of exposing your figure to the eyes of likely trout, if the detention be on your own side of the water; but, if it be, as frequently happens, on the opposite bank, your troubles are

increased. A thistle-head is a stubborn and tough hold for a tiny hook, and a delicate cast has no chance with it in a tug-of-war; hence the loss of much good and effective tackle. Years of practice teach one how to combat these dangers; but the novice should never fish such a stream in the summer-time without waders. With these he can cross from bank to bank and release his fixtures; without them his temper will be tried beyond endurance, and he will retire in disgust. No doubt every aspirant to graduation in the art of fishing should take his first lessons on a burn; but his apprenticeship should be served in the late spring when the stream has a fuller body of water, and the herbage on the bank is as yet short and undeveloped, and without those formidable flower-heads which are veritable traps to catch the barbs of hooks.

For the same reason it is unwise to encumber yourself with a net. It is only in the way, constantly hooking itself to

briar-rose stems, to barbed wire and other entanglements. Occasionally you will miss it, as when once or twice you come to close quarters with a larger fish—a couple of pounds in weight—some patriarch of the stream who should have succumbed to the hook years ago. His large head proclaims him aged, but he fights well, only you cannot hope to land him without a net, for the bank is high and your tackle cannot stand the strain of lifting such a dead-weight up a high bank. Ten to one he breaks away, when you lean over and attempt to grasp him by hand, and he sails off triumphant to his covert under the hollow bank.

Stewart in his *Practical Angler* averred that no man was worth his salt who could not on a summer day secure ten to twelve pounds of trout from such a stream as this. That statement of fifty years ago is often pointed to as showing the decadence of our own day, and as a glimpse of the golden age which has now passed away. But the remark is absolutely true,

even yet, and the angler who knows his business may on any day he pleases, and without any great physical labour, in a five or six hours' outing carry home his fifty odd trout, weighing twelve, thirteen, or fourteen pounds. That is the average basket; of course, the fish are not large; it takes four of them to make a pound, but they are plump and game and shapely, and beautifully spotted. The sport is unrivalled of its kind. We have heard the most skilful salmon anglers and dry-fly enthusiasts affirm that after all there is nothing fit to be compared with the joys of a long summer day spent on a moderately sized burn, either lowland or highland, when there are plenty of small and greedy trout to keep you active, and those who have tasted such pleasures will endorse the dictum.

You do not need to cover much ground. Half a mile a day is quite ground enough. There is no occasion to hurry, and every foot of water should be probed. Your pleasure will be increased if you take

time to note all that is going on around you. A douce-looking bay mare with her lighter-coated foal at her foot will give you greeting over the fence; a group of young stirks, full of grass, will interview you at the next field. The hay-harvest is being secured on one side, while turnip-singling is in progress on the other. The collie-dog, for lack of better employment, there being no rabbits in this quarter to employ his spare activities, comes to exchange the time of day with you, no doubt wondering what occupation it is that makes you linger so long and so aimlessly in his territory. The high-road with its line of telegraph poles is not far off; you hear the corn-buntings piping their lark-like song from the telegraph wires; you see the lapwings, now "packed" for the season, exercising their broad wings over the turnip drills; you note the rapidly bronzing barley, the still delicate green of the oat-pickles, and the variety of colouring in the rich display of potato-blooms. You are not so entirely absorbed in your work that you fail to note

the chance bicyclist and the dust-raising motors that flash past. Occasional traps, of the old school, drawn by a good-going horse, jog to and from the market town; rarely do you see a passenger on foot, for such a primitive mode of locomotion is a rarity in this twentieth century. All the world is on wheels except yourself; but you take your leisurely way amongst the flowers of the brook-side, supremely content with your own sober form of recreation, and every five minutes your basket grows heavier, as trout after trout is carefully lifted from the brook to *terra firma* and laid to rest in your capacious creel.

CHAPTER IX

A WATER-SIDE OBJECT-LESSON

It is a cloudless, scorching, windless July day. The burn is very low, and clear as crystal, but trout are plentiful, being seldom fished for at such a season in this remote and unconsidered lowland brook. They are coming to the well-placed worm with vigour, and the basket every half-hour becomes perceptibly heavier. Easy work, too; no wading, no extent of ground to cover, no troublesome or obstructive wind to negotiate, no difficulties of any kind—everything as it should be. True, the banks are profusely covered—shrouded, indeed, with a jungle of robust and juicy herbage—tall waving reeds, flowering valerians, yellow mimuluses, sword-leaved irises, prickly-headed thistles; but these

instead of incommoding your movements, serve admirably for shelter and concealment. All that a person of moderate stature has to do is to work his way slowly along this fringe of succulent growth and throw his worm well forward, taking good care to keep the hooks clear of the numerous flower-heads that lean sideways over the running water. It is excellent and most enjoyable sport when you get the trout well on the feed; and after three weeks of bright sunshine, they are mad for red worms, and every proper cast means a nibble. Imagine me in the height of this felicity, and thoroughly enjoying my day, "each moment sweeter than before," when along strides a big, stalwart, knickerbockered gamekeeper with rod in hand, and black spaniel at heel. He has been traversing the ground with great rapidity, and looks heated and perspiring. This was the conversation:—

KEEPER. Good-day, sir. Very hot! Not much chance of fish to-day. Too bright!

FISHER. It *is* bright, but that's no bar to a good basket. Have you got nothing?

KEEPER. Not a thing! I haven't seen a trout. What have you done?

FISHER. Oh, pretty well. But this is a good little stream. I've a tidy basket already, and hope to get more before the afternoon is far gone.

KEEPER. Have you, though? May I look at your basket? [He looks and is astonished.] By George! I should think you *have* a basket. That's a fine lot of fish. How long have you been out?

FISHER. I began about eleven; it's now close on two o'clock: only I have been taking things very easily in this broiling day.

KEEPER. Well, it surprises me. I never saw the like of it, but, by the way, have you the proprietor's leave to fish the water?

FISHER. Leave? Not I. I never asked for leave, because I was told down at the village that this burn is not preserved, and that anybody may fish who

cares. I never imagined leave was necessary.

KEEPER. Well, as a rule, we are not very strict, because I never see anybody catching much, but if you are going to clean out our burn like that we'll have to stop you.

FISHER. Whose water is it, may I ask? I don't know even that. If I had thought of there being any restriction I should certainly have had the politeness to write for a formal permit.

KEEPER. It is B. of C.'s water, as far as that clump of Scots firs. But how many fish have you?

FISHER. I have no idea, but we can easily count them.

The basket was emptied out on the grass, and the fish were duly assorted and counted—forty-three in all.

KEEPER. Well, this does astonish me. Here am I sent out day after day to bring in a dish of trout for our lady, who has taken a curious fancy that she would like some, and I have gone back three days

running without a fin in my basket. How do *you* manage to catch them?

FISHER. It's easy enough when you know the way. You see, *you* are fishing downstream with a fly. Now, you are a tall man; you are easily seen, and I'm safe to say every fish is under the bank and in safe hiding long before your flies touch the water. A dry fly upstream might do, but my way is a better way than even that. I'm fishing upstream with worm.

KEEPER. With worm! In clear water and bright sun like this.

FISHER. Yes! Indeed, that's the ideal time for the worm. Only you must keep out of sight, and a small man like myself has a better chance, especially on such overgrown banks as you have here. You will see that I have a heavy stiff rod of considerable length (yours, by the way, is too short and too supple), a fine trace, a Stewart tackle, No. 11, and I always cast well upstream.

KEEPER. Well, I'm blowed! I never

use a worm except when the water is "drumly" after a day's rain.

FISHER. That's just where you make the mistake. The true angler at such a moment ought to stay at home and leave the burn to the boys and the farm-servants. They all appear on the scene when the burn is turbid and swollen after rain.

KEEPER. I must say, what you tell me is a revelation to me, and I should not have believed it if I had not actually seen your basket. Would you mind giving me some of your trout?

FISHER. By all means. You are heartily welcome to take as many as you care for. I have little interest in them after they reach the basket. Pick out a dozen of the best. They are nice tidy fish, very plump and beautiful in their spots. Three or four will make a pound.

KEEPER Well, you are very kind. I'll take these nine, thank you. Now, if you do not mind I should like to see how you work. I want to learn your trick.

FISHER. Well, here goes. Put on a nice bright worm—not too big in this small water. I've had these for a month in damp moss, and now they are in the very pink of condition. No sinker, unless there's a head-wind. Now I'll throw, not into the middle of the current, but almost to the opposite bank, the nearer to the edge the better, provided you run no risk of hooking a rose-bush or a tansy-head or a butter-burr. These are all troublesome and irritating traps for a small Stewart. Now, mark! As soon as the worm slips down to that overhanging ledge, a trout will be sure to shoot out and grab it. There he goes. Now I strike, and I have him. Don't give him much time to dodge about. Out with him at once. If he gets under the bank he'll catch part of the hook in something, or entangle the cast in the flower-spikes, and then you're done for. They told me no sea-trout could get up here, but I lost one down there a few minutes ago. I got such a start when I saw his white belly that I hesitated for

a moment, and that hesitation lost him, for he was under the bank in a trice, and the hold gave. Lift out the fish as gently as you can. A net would make sure of them all, but a net would only be a burden and an incubus amongst so many growing things, and be more bother than benefit. Of course, you'll drop off one or two now and again when the hold happens to be weak and the fish kicks vigorously, but never mind; there are plenty more, and you need not worry if a certain small percentage regain their liberty.

KEEPER. It's wonderful. I would like to have a try. Can you spare me a few worms?

FISHER. Certainly. Here's the bag. Help yourself. Have you some Stewart tackle?

KEEPER. No, but I have a big hook.

FISHER. That's no good. Very tedious process impaling a small worm on a long-shanked hook, and you'll miss the half of your fish. I'm always well stocked with Stewarts at this season. Here are

a few of the right sort. Only your rod is rather supple, and won't lay your worm just exactly where you want it to light. The rebound of a pliable top-joint throws the bait back and out of position. I'll move on a bit out of your way, and I'll see later how you prosper. Good luck to you.

So I moved upstream a few hundred yards, keeping, of course, away from the bank. Resuming, I very soon filled up the vacuum created in my catch by my gift to the keeper. The trout were still biting famously, but after a couple of hours I found it was time for me to reel up. This I did, and before leaving I counted my fish and found I had fifty-three, somewhat over twelve pounds weight in all. I soon regained the high-road which I had left some hours previously and there I encountered my erstwhile pupil awaiting me at the bend.

FISHER. Well, how did you get on with the new and original method ?

KEEPER. Wonderfully. I've bagged

three, which, with the nine you kindly gave me, makes a nice dozen. I begin to think I could manage it, if my rod were stiffer. I'll have another try soon.

FISHER. A little practice will soon make you perfect. Persevere, and always remember to keep yourself out of sight. By the way, what should I do about asking leave? I do not feel comfortable at the thought that I have been poaching. I assure you it is not my way.

KEEPER. Ah, well, as to that, do not disturb yourself. Our laird is sometimes peculiar; he might, and he might not, give you leave, it all depends on the mood he is in at the time. Nobody is likely to see you here but myself. If you'll come back to-morrow or next day I'll get my second lesson, and I should advise you not to write.

CHAPTER X

MUDDY WATERS

On the days when, after heavy and long-continued rains, the rivers come down dark and foul, perhaps the best thing the artistic angler can do is to stay at home and indulge in some other occupation than fishing. And yet, if he has a free day, and finds himself at the river-side under such conditions, ignominious retreat is a self-denial which few enthusiasts can exercise with equanimity. If, in these circumstances, he must have recourse to the primitive worm as the only available lure, he consoles himself with the thought that, if unsportsmanlike, this is the likeliest mode of securing something for his basket.

After a long spell of dry weather, when the rivers have for weeks been running

low, the first August flood in a stream well stocked with trout will stir up the fish to abnormal activity. For a whole week before they have been hard to catch; now they are off their guard, and become quite mad for the worms, which, swept by the heavy rains into the river, are rolling down with the current. At some back-water, at some clean-bottomed area not far from the rush of the central stream, at the point where a burn empties itself into the river, the fish congregate, and a good big worm on a fairly large Stewart tackle, or on a large single hook, will bring them to the basket with wonderful rapidity. Large trout, that were as wary and cunning as foxes before, are now quite unsuspicious and reckless in their attack. The delicate and all but invisible tackle used in the clear water is now a superfluous refinement. A stout grilse cast that will stand a violent tug if it should stick in weeds or other obstruction, is just as unseen as the finest of gut, and enables you to play a two-pounder with some confidence and

without giving him too much of his own way or allowing him to dally over his final capitulation. Upstream casting is also a superfluity. Indeed, all art and finesse have gone from the business almost absolutely. "Ignoble sport! sheer murder!" says the critic, and we quite agree. Only the angler retorts with, "What is to be done when no better way presents itself?"

Some people who have never tried fishing in such "drumly" waters think it is sheer slaughter, that all you have to do is to throw in your line and haul the trout to the bank. And yet without some knowledge and a little skill, the catch may really be small. When the water is heavy, the fish are forced out of their usual resting-places into the smoother and stiller patches at bends in the stream or close by the grassy banks, where they have not to breast a seething and forceful current. This fact is soon learnt, but it has to be learnt all the same. The present writer remembers the day when, as a boy, he accidentally learnt the lesson, long ago on

the Deveron. The river was in half-spate early in September, and having reached it with his rod and a goodly canister of worms, he began fishing the central stream as he had fished it with success a month before when the water was low. For a whole hour his worms floated downstream time and again untouched. He began to think the fish must be gorged, and not in taking mood, but a chance passer-by who stopped to ask how sport was going, withdrew his attention for a moment or two from the line which drifted into the still water close by the bank. In a second a rollicking trout was fast on the hook. It was a revelation; the youthful angler's eyes were suddenly opened. It flashed upon him that he had been on a wrong and futile tack. He changed his method and cast his worm, not into strong currents, but into the smooth and slowly-moving margin. The result was that at every cast he hooked something, and before many hours had passed was able to walk home with a thumping basket. Thus was

learned at first hand a lesson which most beginners acquire at second hand from more experienced fishers. One argument for countenancing this kind of sport in the young is that a successful day will do more to confirm the angling tendency in a youthful aspirant than many days of languid fly-fishing. The moral is, that if you want to stir up the latent fishing instincts of a boy you should not damp his ardour by taking him to the river when he is not likely to catch much, but should introduce him on some such day as that referred to, and let him taste blood plentifully. After such a baptism he will not fall off in enthusiasm.

The question of the proper hooks for this kind of work will be settled by each man according to his own predilections. The clear-water wormer, who has been accustomed to fish the thin waters of July with a No. 11 or 12 Stewart, will do well to keep to the same kind of tackle, but of a larger size. The long practice he has had in hooking and playing fish with this

tackle will ensure his being more successful with it than with the large single hook, which is the more usual engine affected by those who fish mainly in turbid water. There is a distinct difference in the mode of hooking a nibbling fish in the two cases. With a Stewart you are safe to strike at the first tremor; with the single hook, you must give the fish more time, for if you strike before he has the lure well in his mouth, you will strike too soon, and miss him. On the other hand, if you give him too long, he will discover the presence of the hook, and say good-day to it and to your basket. There is a psychological moment to strike in each case—a moment that can be learned only from experience, and we have seen an expert with the Stewart completely out-classed when he attempted to make a basket with the single hook, just as a man long accustomed to the single hook will make a failure at first with the Stewart.

Sea-trout, too, have a somewhat different mode of approach from yellow trout, and

it takes a little practice for one accustomed only to the latter to be successful in hooking every sea-trout that nibbles. The sea-trout as a rule are more dainty and delicate in their manœuvres with the worm, and it takes a good many failures to teach the novice to score. We have seen two fishers in one pool, where the sea-trout were numerous, experiencing the most contrasted sport. One was whipping out trout every few minutes; the other got plenty of nibbles, but never a fish. The difference in the results was due to the unsuccessful man failing to hit the right moment of striking. His worm, when examined after each failure, was found to be chewed, and the loose head and tail were gone, the only part remaining being the bit covering the shank of the hook. He was complacently giving the fish time to discover the deception. Much depends on sensitiveness of touch, an endowment in which individuals differ greatly. If there be a stiff breeze blowing against the line, the delicate bite of a sea-

trout is hardly felt, and only the angler supersensitive of touch will be aware of what is going on under water. Even a two-pound sea-trout — a fish that one would *a priori* expect to make a very demonstrative and unmistakable assault on a worm—approaches the lure so gingerly that you may be deceived into thinking your hook has merely caught in a floating weed. Do not be too sure. Even if it be a weed, there is no harm in striking smartly. If you merely raise your hook to clear it, you will learn what a huge blunder you have made.

The other day the writer had such an experience. At the quiet margin adjoining the throat of a rushing stream, his worm stopped, but he felt no tugging. There are plenty of long trailing weeds at the spot, and in the absence of more definite indications, he concluded that some of the long fibres had twined themselves round the cast. All the same, taught by past experience, he assumed nothing, but after a moment or two struck smartly, and

a great sea-trout sprang to view and in due course was laid on the grass, two pounds and a half in weight, with five or six sea-lice on his tail. Who could have thought that the cautious, stealthy, and undemonstrative stoppage of the worm was due to a fine fish of this kind? Shortly afterwards came a keen and aggressive bite—no mistake about that. I struck, and lo and behold! the fish was a wretched fingerling of a parr!

Interpret the bites by contraries, and you will not be far out. A quick, fussy nibble, followed by a few energetic tugs, tells you that you are in touch with a small fish. The staid, slow and solemn pause indicates a fish of good calibre. Strike, and, barring accidents, he is yours.

In a tidal reach the best mode of securing a basket when the water is opaque is to follow the tide—to fish up with the rising water and down with the ebb. The moment when the tide turns, and the body of water begins to move downwards, is sure to bring some good fish to the

creels. The very spots which you fished as the tide came in, and through which you repeatedly coursed your lure without response, will astonish you when the ebb begins. Trout after trout is landed at places where formerly every cast was drawn blank. But tidal waters are muddy and dirty. If the bottom is greasy mud, the fish avoid that area. A clean, sandy-bottomed bay, however, attracts the sea-trout, and if you know the ground you should linger long at such a place. The only benefit accruing from a change of ground is that most men fish a pool more carefully on the first going over. It is the same with a change of salmon-fly. No alteration may be required and yet it does good to some fishers by inspiring hope and more attentive concentration. This is one of the psychological paradoxes of fishing. *Possunt quia posse videntur.*

CHAPTER XI

CONCLUSION

If the golfer is ever growing a more numerous species, and ever extending his area of conquest, so, too, is the Waltonian, and with a little more encouragement and more scope for his activities he would multiply much faster than he actually does. But fishing rights are increasing in value, and every man who is lucky enough to possess such securities knows their value and insists on maintaining them. Thirty or even twenty years ago things were less stringent, and in those golden days the right to fish for trout was much easier to obtain ; but times have changed, and the rivers are decidedly more difficult of access for the poor man who is unendowed with a stretch of stream which

he can call his own. Here and there, it is true, one may find open a reach of water belonging to some ancient burgh, or some enterprising hotel, or generously made free to the public by some exceptionally liberal proprietor; but in general every river that is worth fishing is closely forbidden to casual visitors, and from source to sea its pools are parcelled out amongst riparian owners, who with one voice exclaim, "Fishing strictly prohibited!" Your impudent pot-hunter of Socialist tenets will still resent the charge of poaching, outdare a keeper's authority and hurl back defiant words at his tormentor; but no right-thinking man likes to be found trespassing and liable to ignominious reproof. It follows that anglers of the best type prefer to arm themselves with proper "permits," if such can be obtained. Every proprietor who has a good fishing stretch is daily in receipt of polite requests to fish for trout in his waters, and no doubt he feels a difficulty in knowing how to deal with

such applications. One way out of the difficulty is to decline all except those of personal friends; another is to grant leave only to those of whom he knows something and for whose respectability he can vouch. Another way of solving the problem is to set apart a certain limited portion of his reach and allow it to be the happy hunting-ground for the selected applicants. This, of course, is only possible when the proprietor has a somewhat extended river-bank. Still it is but fair to remark that if a man has only a trifling section of a river for the private use of himself and his friends, the casual fisherman has sufficient delicacy of feeling to refrain from making request to share it. In practice, a courteous appeal for a day's fishing seldom fails of a favourable response, or if, through special circumstances, such as the presence of friends on the water, it is dismissed, the refusal is always couched in gentlemanly terms.

After all, when leave is given, what does it mean? Permission to catch trout

if you can. The privilege sometimes amounts to very little. How few are the days on which full baskets are possible! The number of expert anglers is really small, and in general the diminution of the stock of trout even by a succession of ardent fishers is but slight and relatively inconsiderable. A good many proprietors forbid worm-fishing absolutely at all seasons from a mistaken idea that it is too successful, and kills more trout than they care for. The angler who holds a different view should respect this restriction, and, if granted a day, should not abuse the privilege by contravening regulations, but adhere to other lures.

We do not forget that the difficulty of finding suitable scope for his ingenuity has converted many an angler to the political heresy that rivers should be nationalized, should belong to the people, and should be free to all and sundry. An Act of Parliament could throw them open to-morrow; but nothing would be more fatal to the art of angling than such

an innovation. If rivers were free it would be no one's business to protect them, and the poacher's net would soon sweep every fish from the water. That way no help lies.

A recent legal decision to the effect that the public are absolutely without fishing rights on every stream, except by the permission of the proprietor, has fluttered the angling community. We believe that this important pronouncement will not alter the *status quo* in the North of Scotland; but should it have the result that anglers are to be shut out from streams in which for many years they have been privileged to fish, there would be a strong case for an alteration in the law. Backed by popular opinion, our members of Parliament will not be slow to agitate for a return to use and wont.

A liberality on the part of proprietors creates a healthy opinion in the minds of the angling fraternity, and sets up a barrier against poaching and nefarious practices. For if the most respectable type of angler

is debarred from sport, he is apt to become antagonistic, and callous to the proprietor's interest. He will say of the river, as the lyrist said of his love,

> "If she be not fair to me,
> What care I how fair she be?"

Seldom having the chance of exercising his skill, he may be excused if he feels indifferent to interests which have ceased to minister to his personal enjoyment. We are certain that no amount of legitimate fishing will seriously deplete rivers with plenty of tributaries. These are nurseries, and prolific nurseries, of trout. Strangely enough, such side-streams are not protected, but they are the crux of the whole situation. Upon them and their produce depends the welfare of the main river. Every spate carries down a fresh relay of trout to fill the gaps made by the rods in the wider river, and when the side-streams are populous, the river will never be lacking in inhabitants. Two poachers with a net will, in a single night, catch as many trout

as all the possible anglers can secure by rod and line in a season. No doubt, if the water be much fished, the trout will be fewer, and more educated in detecting lures, and good baskets will then be reserved for the expert. This, so far from being a matter to be deplored, is one rather for gratification. Too much preservation may be actually detrimental; it will increase the number of the fish, but will diminish their size and quality. A river, like a moor, can support only a certain amount of life, and if there are more mouths to fill than it can feed, the fish will be starved, and become a prey to their natural enemies, the heron, the otter, the eel, and the cannibals of their own kind. These will restore the balance in time, but if the angler had free scope, the balance would never be upset.

It is a cynical remark that the casual fisherman is sure to obtain a "permit" when there is not much chance of catching anything. This is putting it too strongly, but it is undoubtedly true that some

proprietors dislike hearing of big baskets being caught by strangers. The moral is not to be too forward and ostentatious in declaring the result of your day. The man who has earned the reputation of securing record catches is looked at askance, as one not to be encouraged. This is not as it should be.

Izaak Walton said that the fisher, like the poet, is born, and Izaak was right. Many worthy people still hold by Johnson's definition of the angler. Votaries of golf and cricket laugh the pastime to scorn as slow, and as making too many demands on patience. Its charm is indescribable and incommunicable; to be understood, it must be felt. Apart from the opportunities it affords for observation, and the healthful open-air exercise, which it shares with other sports, its greatest fascination lies, perhaps, in its glorious uncertainty. You never know what the next minute will produce; when things are apparently at their worst, you may be on the point of hooking a record fish. Until he is safe in

your landing-net, however, the uncertainty remains, and adds to that exhilaration of feeling which is unintelligible to the non-angler. To lose your night's rest, and to stand by the river-side for hours, in rain or in darkness, seems idiotic to those who do not sympathize. To the uninitiated, and to those who have not come under its spell, golf seems equally futile. Happily, we are not all constituted alike. De Quincey's dictum is pat: "Not to sympathize is not to understand."

THE HUMBLE WORM.

Let other anglers laud the fly,
Be it wet, or be it dry;
I sing a lure of meaner guise,
A bait that every rod should prize—
The humble worm.

The minnow, parr-tail, have their hour,
The creeper, maggot, each has power,
But nothing makes a catch so sure,
When days are long, as that prime lure—
A good earth-worm.

The tyro waits till heavy rain
Has given to streams a turbid stain;
Then by a quiet pool he stands
Impaling with his clumsy hands
A wriggling worm.

He pulls the speckled beauties out,
Cast after cast, trout after trout.
'Tis murder pure, and fills the pot,
But men of better mould will not
Thus use a worm.

When July drought makes rivers low,
And waters clear as diamonds flow,
Then upstream cast your tackle light,
With, on your Stewart hooks, a bright
And lively worm.

Watch well the spots where monsters lurk,
And up the current slowly work,
Hiding your head from eager eyes,
That ought to see, without surprise,
Nought but your worm.

And when you feel a gentle thrill
Shoot up your line, you wisely will
Strike short and sharp; you've hooked a trout,
Who plunges madly to throw out
Your barbèd worm.

The good March Brown in April, May,
Your labour sweet will better pay,
But when the pink wild roses blow
Or heather blooms, 'tis time to show
The blue-nosed worm.

"The thing's amiss," some critics sneer;
"'Tis dirty work and torture sheer."
Yet empty baskets change their tune,
And they discard, in leafy June,
The fly, for worm.

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